



The League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara

VOTER

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2015

MONEY IN POLITICS CONSENSUS MEETINGS



Tuesday, January 12, 2016, 6:30 pm
Harlem Road Community Center, 4255
Harlem Road, Amherst 14226

Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 12:30 pm
LWVBN League Office, 1272 Delaware
Avenue, Buffalo 14209

We've scheduled two consensus meetings, one in the afternoon and another in the early evening. Choose the one most convenient for you.

It's January in Western New York. We'll welcome you at the beginning of each meeting with hot coffee, cocoa and cookies.

The consensus questions are included with this Voter. *Please bring them with you!*

Part I addresses the goals of campaign finance regulation in terms of democratic values. Part II relates to the extent to which First Amendment protections like free speech and freedom of the press should apply to various speakers and activities in the campaign finance context. Part III concerns itself with the methods of campaign finance regulation.

We spent most of 2015 studying the issues around Money in Politics and its First Amendment implications. Lawrence Lessig joined us by video at our summer picnic and Zephyr Teachout came in person on Constitution Day in September to share their MIP concerns. **Now it is our time to join local Leagues throughout the country to give the national League the tools it needs to take action on the critical issue of Money in Politics on our behalf. This is how democracy works in our organization!**

Mission of the League of Women Voters:

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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Presidents' Report and Board Actions



At its November meeting, the board of directors and two guest members unanimously approved concurrence with the LWV Ohio Raise the Age position meeting and sent this decision to the LWV New York State for action by the state board of directors.

The board also approved three legislative priorities for 2016 to suggest to the state League. Thank you, Marian Deutschman, for sending the following report to the LWV New York State:

- Campaign finance: LWVBN believes in the continuation of advocacy on campaign finance reform, including current priorities.
- Natural resources: LWVBN recommends continuation of advocacy on legislation, regulation and executive action to protect natural resources, public health and address economic impacts of the fossil fuel industry and hazardous waste.
- Health care: LWVBN recommends that we explore unsafe conditions in hospital settings due to inadequate staffing ratios.

The LWV New York State issues/advocacy team, which includes the off-board issues specialists and our state legislative chair, will discuss the priorities suggested by all Leagues and the legislation that is most likely to be proposed in the 2016 State Senate and Assembly session. This body then will recommend the priorities that League members statewide are to discuss next spring with their local representatives to the State Senate and Assembly.

Visits to our elected representatives are a most important part of our political action activities. We are planning a lively training session to enable League and community members to practice meeting with elected officials in the next few months. Please consider joining us. It really isn't a daunting task. Remember, the folks who represent us need our good will and appreciate thoughtful citizens. They respect the League and listen to our points of view, even if they don't always agree with us. We'll have details about the training session in the next Voter.

The LWVBN board of directors and the program committee chairs are also updating our League's list of contacts with organizations with which we may want to partner for program events or ask to co-sponsor League programs. We invite members to suggest organizations whose mission or activities relate to League activities. We can have a greater impact in the community if we work with others. We need organization names, a key contact person and her/his email address and phone number. Please send your suggestions to Mary Ann at the League office. Our efforts will have greater effect if you actually have a relationship with any group you refer.

The phone system at the League office is antiquated. Some phone messages are not recorded and, though callers leave their numbers, we cannot view them. Many times the numbers are garbled or have been spoken too fast for retrieval. At the November board meeting, we approved purchase of a TracFone for use as our main office phone. Callers' numbers will be recorded and easy to retrieve if needed. *Therefore, as of December 1, 2015, the LWVBN official office phone number will be 716-986-4898.* This change will also enable Mary Ann to return calls when she works from home beginning in January. We will continue to use the old phone in the office for outgoing calls only.

Mary Ann and Flora have begun work on the 2016 *They Represent You*. They would appreciate a few volunteers to help make phone calls to elected officials for contact information. At the request of many people, we're adding email addresses and also the salaries of the officials listed in our directory. We especially can use help to contact Niagara County officials. Please call the office at **716-986-4898** or send an email to lwvbn@lwvbn.org if you can help us with this important work.

We send many wishes for Happy Holidays and a healthy and prosperous year in 2016.

-Judy Metzger & Terri Parks

Money in Politics: December Update - Options for Reform

Summarized below are three approaches to reform that address decisions made by the United States Supreme Court that have weakened laws regulating political campaign contributions and spending. Current LWVUS policy positions support many legislative and regulatory reform proposals.

Legislative approaches

- Enact stronger disclosure laws. The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld disclosure as a means of providing information to the electorate and avoiding corruption or the appearance of corruption.
- Tighten rules governing coordination in order to limit “independent” spending. U.S. Supreme Court decisions have allowed unlimited campaign spending that is *not* coordinated with a candidate in any way. However, rules are weak and coordination occurs in many ways.
- Adopt public funding for all candidates. Resources to support public funding would have to be established. At present, public funding is optional, and in most cases where it is offered, it is insufficient and/or unreliable.
- Prohibit members of Congress from fundraising from the interests they directly regulate.
- Change the makeup of the U.S. Supreme Court by including more justices friendly to reform.

Regulatory approaches

- Strictly enforce campaign finance laws. The Federal Election Commission is considered ineffective as an enforcement agency. Lawsuits are pending to force the agency to exercise its enforcement powers.
- Adopt a Securities and Exchange Commission (S.E.C.) rule to require public companies to disclose their political activities, including campaign donations and lobbying efforts.
- Strengthen and enforce 501(c)(4) political activity rules. The I.R.S. should strictly enforce 501(c)(4) rules and close loopholes that allow unlimited secret election spending while still protecting truly nonpartisan voter service activities.

Amend the U.S. Constitution to overturn U.S. Supreme Court rulings.*

More than a dozen different amendments to the Constitution have been proposed that directly relate to the financing of elections. Many of the proposals contain provisions that would:

- Restore the authority of Congress and the states to limit campaign spending.
- Assert that the rights protected by the Constitution are those of natural persons only. Some proposals add that the privileges of corporate and other collective entities are created by statute and are not inalienable.
- Allow Congress and the states to enact measures such as public financing and disclosure.
- Forbid the judiciary from construing the expenditure of money as protected speech.
- State that nothing in the amendment shall limit freedom of the press.

*LWVUS’s Constitutional Amendment Study is developing guidelines for evaluating and responding to constitutional amendment proposals.

Article V of the Constitution provides two ways to amend the Constitution. Congress, by a two-thirds vote of both chambers, may propose constitutional amendments to the states for ratification. OR, the legislatures of two-thirds of the states (34 at present) may ask Congress to call a convention to propose amendments to the Constitution. Amendments proposed by either method must be ratified by three-fourths of the states (38 at present). Of the more than 1,000 amendments proposed, Congress has submitted only 33 amendments to the states, of which 27 were approved and 26 are currently in effect.

Voter Services

On November 1, after receiving a request from Roselle Lewis from Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, I set up a table in the vendors' area at the Lucky Names Luncheon and Fashion Show sponsored by Alpha Kappa Alpha at the Buffalo Marriott Hotel.

Since it was too late to register to vote in this year's general election, I set up an assortment of informational materials about voting, elections and organ donation.

I spoke to many people about the importance of registering and voting in local, state and national elections. Many had questions about deadlines and qualifications for voting, address changes, absentee ballots and organ donation. Several people, mostly young people attending the event with their mothers or aunts, took voter registration forms.

Voter Service activities are about over for this year and it is time for me to prepare the year-end report for the state League. I will also be reviewing voter participation in the November election.

- Margaret Brunson, chair, Voter Services

LWVBN Volunteers

Thanks to the efforts of our volunteers, we have filled all of our commitments for naturalization ceremonies this year. The new schedule for 2016 will be out soon and our volunteers will have an opportunity to choose dates for upcoming ceremonies.

Laura McDade and Judy Casassa represented the LWVBN at the naturalization ceremony at the Hamburg Middle School in October and Margaret and Dan Brunson were our representatives at a U.S. Courthouse ceremony during October as well. The November 5 ceremony at the courthouse was attended by Pauline Dyson and Terri Parks.

JoAnn Mecca and Ramona Gallagher volunteered to work on election night reporting for the Associated Press.

The work of the LWVBN would not be possible without the commitment and loyalty of our volunteers. We are grateful for their work.

-Judith Clarke, LWVBN volunteer coordinator

Membership News

The League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara is a nonpartisan organization working for democracy not only in the voting booth, but also in situations that might prevent citizens from carrying out the important privilege of voting. We need all our members to continue their support of the League as they have in the past. We are contacting members who have yet to renew for the membership year that began July 1, 2015. Please send your membership renewal if you have not already done so.

In addition, I am suggesting a goal for this year: that each member bring in a new member to expand our League with fresh faces and voices.

At the end of October, Terri Parks and four other members of our board participated in a conference call with Lisa Scott from the Suffolk County League in her capacity as a membership and leadership development coach. We discussed with her our use of social media, our website, publicity efforts, and alliances with other organizations. In addition to the goals of the League, our local strengths are to be found in our membership, the people and their knowledge, and our programs, such as our recent Zephyr Teachout event and Lunch & Issues programs, along with other volunteer activities, such as our work with the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority.

- Sue Stievater, chair Membership Committee



Important

New office hours at the League office begin January 1, 2016

Beginning January 1, 2016, the League office will be open every Tuesday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. I will be available via the League cell phone, **716-986-4898**, on Tuesday from 10 to 3, Wednesday from 10 to 2 and Friday from 10 to 1. I will be working from home on Wednesdays and Fridays and will have the office computer there. All visits should be made to the office on Tuesday but, if there's an emergency, I will come to the office on a Wednesday or Friday. You may call the office cell phone and leave a message any day. I'll return your call during the office hours.

Packages of voter registration forms and voter cards are available in the office for naturalization volunteers. They can be found on a shelf in the right hand cupboard in the room to the left of the office and can be picked up during regular office hours of the Network of Religions Communities whenever needed. There are 60 items in each package.

Please communicate with me via email so I can keep track of requests for meeting rooms, materials, and other needs.

- Mary Ann Turkla, office manager

Great Decisions takes a break!

Reminder: Great Decisions does not meet in December, January and February but will resume on Thursday, March 3, 2016, when Joan Photiadis will lead our eighth topic from the 2015 listings, *Brazil's Metamorphosis*. So far eight people have signed up for Great Decisions 2016. (I listed the topics in the October Voter.) Unfortunately, the Foreign Policy Association has raised the price for briefing books to \$25 but there is an ongoing 10% discount on orders of 10 or more. I will not be ordering the new briefing books until January 30, so you have until then to contact me if you wish to be included.

- Bernice Baeumler

In Memoriam

Long time League leader Polly Ferguson died peacefully on November 13, 2015, at Maine Medical Center. Polly moved to South Portland, Maine, in 2008 and became active in the LWV Maine among other volunteer activities. She served on the Maine state board and attended countless naturalization ceremonies to ensure that new citizens had an opportunity to register to vote. Polly is remembered fondly and with great respect for her work with LWVBN. Donations in her memory may be made to the Erie County SPCA, 205 Ensminger Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150.



Don't forget to join us on Saturday, December 5, 2015 at noon for a fun and inspiring afternoon with your League friends and guests. The annual Holiday Party will be held at Rizotto Ristorante, 930 Maple Road, Williamsville, 14221. The \$22 per person cost includes Italian Wedding Soup, Greens, Chicken Marsala, a vegetable, beverage and a special dessert. A vegetarian pasta dish will be an alternative entrée if you request it when you send your check to the League Office. **Reservations must be received by November 23, 2015.**

Mail your check payable to LWVBN with the names of everyone who is covered by the check to LWVBN, 1272 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14209.



OF BUFFALO/NIAGARA
1272 Delaware Ave, Buffalo, NY 14209-2401



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



December & Early January Meetings & Events

Wed., 12/2, 1:00 p.m.

Economic Justice, League Office

Sat., 12/5, 12:00 noon

Annual Holiday Party

Rizotto Ristorante

Tues., 12/8, 4:00 p.m.

Issues Committee, Harlem Road
Community Center.

Wed., 12/9, 1:30 p.m.

Local Government, League Office

Mon., 12/14, 4:00 p.m.

Board Meeting, League Office

Tues., 1/5, 4:00 p.m.

Issues Committee, Harlem Road Community
Center

Mon., 1/11, 4:00 p.m.

Board Meeting, League Office

Tues., 1/12, 6:30 p.m.

**Consensus Meeting, Harlem Road
Community Center**

Wed., 1/13, 12:30 p.m.

Consensus Meeting, League Office

REMINDER: The next deadline for the Voter is Friday, December 18. All copy, photos, etc., should be sent to Sandy Chelnov (chelnovs@gmail.com). Voter copy will go to Barb Jezioro only after it has been edited and proofread.

Important: The League Office has a new phone number: 716-986-4898